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Theatrical Portraits
by
Robert Dighton and Sons

FIFTY ENGRAVINGS BY
ROBERT DIGHTON (1752–1814)
ROBERT DIGHTON, JR. (1786–1865)
DENIS DIGHTON (1792–1827)
RICHARD DIGHTON (1795–1880)

The Edward Sheldon Exhibition Rooms

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Theatrical Portraits
by
Robert Dighton and Sons

The Harvard Theatre Collection

Thomas Garrett
Guest Curator

In cooperation with
Fredric Woodbridge Wilson
Curator

With the assistance of the Harvard Theatre Collection staff

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ROBERT DIGHTON AND SONS

Robert Dighton, the father in Robert Dighton and Sons, was an artist during the day, a performer at night, and a thief occasionally.

He was born in London, probably in 1752, the son of John Deighton, a print seller (Robert subsequently dropped the 'e' from the name). In 1772, he entered the Royal Academy School, and after completing his studies, he set up as a free-lance artist, styling himself "drawing master." Water color was his best medium, but he also did line engravings, etchings, and mezzotints; oil painting seems not to have interested him at all. For the next twenty years he mostly did contract work for several London print publishers and sellers, but mainly Carver and Bowles and its successor Carrington Bowles.

In 1794, he settled at No. 12 Charing Cross and established his own shop. In an advertisement in the London *Morning Chronicle*, he says:

CORRECT LIKENESS. Mr. Dighton, No. 12 Charing Cross informs the Public that he continues to take correct elegant likenesses in miniature for half a guinea, in half an hour & in a manner peculiar to himself, & which have given such universal satisfaction to his Employers. They are adapted for a frame or to set in a locket.

He takes the whole length figure in the same manner, with an appropriate room, garden or landscape, for two guineas, frames included. Mr. Dighton will attend any distance under ten miles to take likenesses (not less than four).

Some of Robert's early work reflected upon the political and social enmity between England and France, on those everyday burdens we suffer (doctors, lawyers, clerics, *et al.*), and on our human frailties (vanity, greed, sloth, *et al.*), and by this work he was lumped in with the famous Georgian caricaturists Gilray, Rowlandson, and Cruickshank. It was a misplaced assignment, for only a few of Robert's pictures are caricatures in a dictionary sense of the word: "In *Art*. Grotesque or ludicrous representation of persons or things by exaggeration of their most characteristic and striking features," or "a portrait or other artistic representation, in which the characteristic features of the original are exaggerated with ludicrous effect" (both from *O.E.D.*). His zany "The Pit Door" and the companion pieces, "At a Tragedy" and "At a Comedy," are unquestionably caricatures. But most of his work, with rare exception, is graced with a benevolent and gentle humor. However, the caricaturist label was firmly on him, and, in the mid-1790s, when he began drawing his full-length humorous profile portraits (a genre he is said to have originated), they were and still are deemed caricatures. One could argue that some were the reverse of caricatures: John Braham was

conspicuously short and fat and possessed of an enormous nose, yet in Robert's portrait he is tall, slender, and has a nose that befits his face. Robert published well over a hundred of these portraits; his subjects included a wide range of people but mostly peers, politicians, financiers, military figures, academics, sporting figures, and, of course, actors and singers.

"Of course, actors and singers," because Robert was simultaneously involved in a second career. At the end of the regular workday, Robert put away his brushes and paints, removed his smock and beret, and headed to one of London's theatres or pleasure gardens where he donned his costume for that night's performance as an actor and singer. He had a strong bass voice, a flair for accents, and a natural bent for comedy. His debut appearance was in 1776 at the Haymarket Theatre in an unknown role in an unnamed play. In 1777 he was a part of the acting company at the Brighton Theatre, after which he disappears from view until 1781, when he played in Bickerstaffe's *The Padlock* at the Haymarket. From then on, he was a steady performer at Sadler's Wells and at Vauxhall Gardens. He appeared in several other plays by Bickerstaffe, Hitchcock, and the younger Colman, but he performed mostly in short pieces written by Charles Dibdin and Thomas Dibdin that were variously classed as "sketches," "burlettas," "recitatives," "extravaganzas," "entertainments," or other fugitive forms. His most famous role was the title character in *Dennis O'Neals's Return from Campaigning*, and he did a self-portrait as Dennis (Robert's was not a small ego: he did self-portraits in at least two other roles). While he was never a part of the regular acting companies of either Covent Garden or Drury Lane, he appeared at both in other performers' benefits. His last known performance was at Covent Garden in 1806.

Robert had two illegitimate children by an unknown mother or mothers, Robert Jr. and Denis. In 1791, Robert married Miss Bertles (her given name is not known), a featured singer at Sadler's Wells and Vauxhall Gardens, and with her had two children, Sarah and Richard.

Robert Dighton died in London in 1814, his wife having predeceased him by some years.

Robert, Dighton, Jr., the eldest son, was born in 1786. He attended the Royal Academy and is first noticed in 1800, when his father published one of his etchings, a full-length portrait of an officer of the Third Dragoon Guards. Over the next six years, Dighton *père* published about three dozen more etchings by Dighton *fils*, all but six of them picturing military subjects. Robert Jr. followed his father's style very closely—with a somewhat firmer line, but the same palette, same chiaroscuro, same contrivances—so closely that some historians have assumed that they were one and the same person. But there was a real Robert Jr. As a draftsman, he was probably better than his father, and might well

have become a superb artist, but art was not his first love, obvious surely from the subjects of his drawings. In 1808, Robert Jr. secured an appointment as Ensign in the West Norfolk Militia, and in 1809, transferring to the Thirty-eighth Regiment of Foot and advancing to lieutenantcy, he began his life as a professional soldier. He served five years in the Peninsula campaign, two years in France, and six years in India. He retired from the army in 1835; he died in 1865.

Denis Dighton, Robert's second son, was born in 1792. He attended the Royal Academy, displaying his pictures there first in 1811 (and continuing to do so until 1825). Also in 1811, his father published Denis's portrait of the actress, Nannette Johnston, in which he had slavishly followed his father's style. Denis found an immediate patron in George, Prince of Wales (later George IV), who, later that year, granted him a commission in the 90th Regiment of Foot. Denis resigned after just one year to marry and set up in London as an artist. George was constant to his young friend and, in 1815, appointed him "Battle Painter and Military Draughtsman to the Prince of Wales," sending him frequently to record battles and battlegrounds—Denis was at Waterloo two days after Wellington's victory. During the peaceful years that followed, Denis wrote and illustrated two children's books, and collaborated on a drawing book. In 1824, with the establishment of the National Gallery, the royal acquisition policies changed, and Denis lost his patronage. This, along with other undisclosed personal problems, prompted a mental breakdown. He died in France in 1827.

Richard Dighton was born in 1795. He followed his father and brothers to the Royal Academy. Upon his father's death in 1814, with brothers Robert Jr. serving in the army and Denis having a Royal appointment, it was Richard who picked up the Dighton mantle and continued to issue the humorous full-length profile portraits. But, alas, of Robert's three sons, Richard was the weakest artist. He was a conscientious draftsman but with too feeble and too light a hand. His figures are wooden (even those pictured in motion) and have little apparent energy. Richard's humor was as great as his father's but of a completely different sort: Robert's portraits are amusing visually—one need not know anything about Stephen Kemble to chortle at his picture. Richard's portraits, too, are amusing, but often only when one understands the word play of the titles or the tricks he has worked into the drawings—for example, "A Stirling Banker" is a portrait of the Director of the Bank of England, fortuitously named, Sir Walter Stirling. His output was prodigious, mostly "city" types: bankers, barristers, jaded M.P.'s, and actors and singers. Richard does have two feathers on his beret: historians of British costume regard his pictures as the best source for men's fashions during the first third of the nineteenth century, and art historians credit him as the immediate forerunner of the famous *Vanity Fair* caricatures of prominent personalities that began in 1868. Richard fades

from view in the 1830's, however he lived until 1880.

Sarah Dighton, so far as is known, had no calling to be an artist. She did have some aspirations as a singer and sought an engagement at Sadler's Wells but was turned down. She married an architect and settled into domesticity.

Thomas Garre

Theatrical Portraits by *Robert Dighton and Sons*

A BOOK OF HEADS

By Robert Dighton

The Houghton Library, HTC 26,961.

In 1795, Bowles and Carver at "No. 69 St. Pauls Churchyard London," published Robert Dighton's only book, *A Book of Heads*. It is a collection of portraits done in profile—they would be called "head shots" in today's parlance—of London city types. Tracing Robert's progress from the publication of *A Book of Heads*, he adopted the consistent profile pose and went from heads to half-length to full-length portraits.

The frontispiece to *A Book of Heads* is a self-portrait done as a line engraving. Dighton shows himself in profile, facing right, wearing a smart wig, a frock coat, a ruffled jabot, and ruffled cuffs. On his right little finger he sports a large ring, and in his hand he holds a *porte crayon*. He carries a portfolio chock-full of drawing or prints. On the cover of the portfolio, in billboard fashion, is the caption:

A BOOK OF HEADS
by
ROBT DIGTON.
Portrait Painter
and
Drawing Master.

In preparation for the engraving, Dighton painted a number of watercolor studies. The study owned by the British Museum has a note at the bottom in Dighton's hand, "Bobby Brush the Phiz maker."

This study and the resulting engraving, also shown, are from the Houghton Library.

WILLIAM HENRY WEST BETTY (1799–1874)

By Robert Dighton

While he was yet a toddler, Betty demonstrated a keen memory, and his mother, for whatever reason, taught him the great speeches from Shakespeare's and others' works. At age ten, he was taken to a performance of Mrs. Siddons in *Pizarro*. It is said that he knew in a moment where his future lay.

The British have ever had a fondness for the odd, the eccentric, the *outré*, and in 1803 a wily manager in Belfast booked the eleven-year-old Betty for four performances. He was an unparalleled success, and as word spread, he was soon in demand in cities and towns all over the British Isles. He was billed as "Master Betty" or "The Young Roscius," thus comparing him to Quintus Roscius, the great first-century-B.C. Roman actor. When he made his London début on December 1, 1804, playing Achmet in *Barbarossa*, the crush of people trying to enter Covent Garden was so great that the military was called out to preserve order (in spite of the soldiers, a large number of people were injured). Betty conquered London as quickly and as completely as he had the provinces.

Robert pushed his portrait out on December 3, but it is only jejune work and totally devoid of his usual humor.

Betty's costume is perfect *turquerie*, a brief phase in British fashion. He wears a surcoat and turban trimmed with fur, an embroidered sash and waistcoat, a crescent emblem at the neck, and pantaloons tied with ribbons. It may have been *au courante*, but it was hardly authentic.

WILLIAM HENRY WEST BETTY (1799–1874)

By Robert Dighton, Jr.

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,901.

Master Betty's instant and widespread success in London generated an unprecedented demand for pictures of this new idol. It was a seller's market, and Robert Dighton, Jr. jumped in, competing even with his father.

For his second London offering, Betty, on December 10, displayed his characterization of Norval in John Hume's tragedy, *Douglas*. Robert Jr. drew and H. R. Cook engraved a portrait of Betty that was published within days. Compared to Robert Jr.'s other work (Cook is unknown), the Betty portrait is a but a workaday effort: he captures Betty's appearance and his youthful figure, but he gives him no energy, no strength, and no vitality—poor Betty is but a sorry cardboard cutout wearing what can only be considered a most curious costume.

Betty continued as Frederick in Mrs. Inchbald's *Lovers Vows*, with Robert Jr.

and Cook still following closely behind. They issued a half-length portrait of him on January 1, 1805.

As it had to, Betty's star faded; in London it took about two years and in the provinces a somewhat longer time. But while his star shone, Betty amassed a huge fortune that allowed him to live comfortably until his death at age eighty-three.

Not everyone was impressed with William Henry West Betty, the "Young Roscius." Elizabeth Inchbald probably spoke for many when she deemed him, "a clever little boy."

JOSEPH MUNDEN (1758–1832)

By Robert Dighton

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,909.

Munden is known as a comedian, but it would be more accurate to call him a clown. He had remarkable improvisational skills that some thought he too often used, grousing that he would have been better had he simply said what the author set down rather adding his own business. On the other hand, it was also said by several people that his interpolated business saved more than one mediocre play from falling into immediate oblivion.

Robert did at least four portraits of Munden, among them, in costume, as Verdun the butler in Elizabeth Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows* (seen in the book below) and as Sir Matthew Maxim in Thomas Dibdin's *Five Thousand a Year*. The latter is interesting in its use decorating a sheet music cover, for illustrated covers are rare at this time. Robert probably etched both portraits on contract, for they are much smaller than his usual portrait format. In any event, the publisher took Robert's plate for *Five Thousand a Year*, contracted for another plate made by an "engraver of lettering" (a highly specialized trade), locked both into a printer's chase, and printed the picture and text as one. Did Robert color the whole issue, or was that left to the purchaser? This copy is carefully tinted suggesting a professional hand.

The song behind the cover was a part of the prologue, written by Dibdin and delivered by Munden; it was a four-verse, four line song that followed a twenty-one line poem.

ANGELICA CATALANI (1780–1849)

By Robert Dighton

Hand-colored engraving. Semiramide.

Having established her reputation in Italy and Spain, Catalani descended upon London with a favorable contract to sing at the King's Theatre, favorable in the unconscionable amount that she would be paid (200 guineas per night) and in the stipulation that the management hire no other singer of her caliber. She made her début on December 13, 1806, singing the title-role in Marcos António Portugal's opera, *La Morte di Semiramide*. Her performance was a tumultuous success, and London was enchanted.

Robert cashed in on Catalani's celebrity by quickly publishing his gentle caricature of her (it was done in less than three weeks). He depicts her tripping lightly forward with her arms outstretched in a most ingratiating pose. Judging from other contemporary portraits, Robert has extended her height, moderately shortened and re-angled her nose, and generously increased her buxomness. While her elegant dress is based completely on contemporary fashions, it is the standardized Georgian "Oriental" costume. The gown, with its harem-like qualities, especially the ruched sleeves, and her accessories—the gold fillet in her hair, the tasseled mantle, and the long flowing train—told audiences that she was a barbarian.

Catalani remained at the King's Theatre until 1814, when she moved to Paris where she became the director of the Théâtre Italien. She sang again in London in 1824 and retired soon thereafter.

TRISTRAM SHANDY

Illustrated by Robert Dighton

Engraving.

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,967.

From the beginning of printing through about 1825, books were generally sold in one of two formats. In the first, called "unbound," the quires were folded and stitched and covered with a temporary protective cover, intended for binding at the purchaser's expense and taste. In the second, called "trade bound," a simple binding was added by the bookseller (and not the publisher), and the book sold for a slightly higher price. Those who bought the unbound format, of say a novel or travel book, might then purchase from a print dealer plates illustrative of events in the story or of places visited, and have them bound in with printed pages.

The print dealer Carrington Bowles engaged Robert Dighton to prepare a set of twelve plates for Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (published serially in

eight volumes between 1759 and 1767). Dighton's plates were published January 3, 1785. Plate 1 is shown.

1. Obadiah's ill timed complisance to Doctor Slop in the Dirty Lahe.
2. Corporal Trim reading the Sermon to M^r Shandy, Uncle Toby, and Doctor Slop.
3. M^r Shandy, Uncle Toby, and Corporal Trim, bringing in the Mortars.
4. The Lady Baussiere, attended by her Page; with her decayed Kinsman begging.
5. Corporal Trim's reflection on Mortality in the Kitchen, on the Death of Master Bobby.
6. Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim, viewing their Artificial Fortifications.
7. Doctor Slop, and Susanna quarreling: The Nurse with Tristram Shandy in her lap.
8. Tristram Shandy's Journey from Boulogne to Montreuil, in a Post Chaise.
9. Tristram Shandy meeting with the Peasants between Nismes and Lunel.
10. Widow Wadman's Plan of Attack on Uncle Toby.
11. Uncle Toby with Corporal Trim going to visit the Widow Wadman, M^r and M^{rs} Shandy watching them.
12. Tristram Shandy discovering Maria, with her little Goat beside her.

JOHN BRAHAM (1774?–1856)

By Robert Dighton

Hand-colored engraving. Caption: Mr BRAHAM in the character of ORLANDO. to Mr THO's DIBDIN {the Author of the CABINET &c} this PRINT is inscrib'd by his FRIEND ROB't DIGHTON. Drawn, Etch'd, & Pub'd by Dighton, Char'g Cross, March. 22nd, 1802.

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,908.

Braham's first appearance on stage was at Covent Garden where as a boy soprano he sang *entr'acte* songs and ethereal roles—Cupid, Hymen, and such. Inevitably his voice cracked. It took three years for his voice to find its adult setting, and when it did it was perfect. According to *The New Grove Dictionary*, his voice had "a range of A to e²," the scale so even that the change to falsetto was said to be imperceptible." Braham was one of the greatest tenors ever heard on the English stage, and his singing commanded huge audiences in cities all

over Europe.

Robert's portrait of Braham might be called a caricature in reverse. In life, Braham was conspicuously short and conspicuously stout and had an unusually large nose, but Robert very graciously depicts him as tall and impeccably trim and with a nose that befits his face. There are more than forty known portraits of Braham, in ordinary dress and in costume, including a watercolor by Robert Dighton and an oil by Richard Dighton, but it is this caricature that is most often used to illustrate Braham in musical dictionaries and encyclopedias.

Of the recondite dedication below the picture, Robert and Thomas Dibdin were old friends from their days at Sadler's Wells. Dibdin wrote the libretto for the subject opera, *The Cabinet* (it was a retelling of the ancient ballad, *The Golden Bull*). Incidentally, Braham composed the music for *his* role, while, in what had to be a too-many-cooks arrangement, four others composed the rest.

GEORGE FREDERICK COOKE (1756–1812)

By Robert Dighton

Hand-colored engraving.

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,964.

Cooke was one of the finest actors ever to appear on the British stage. While he was best in tragic roles, particularly ones of high emotion and demonic fury, he was superb in comedy, high and low, as well (he once played Shylock in the main piece and Sir Archy Macsarcasm from *Love-à-la-Mode* in the afterpiece). He was beloved of audiences everywhere, from the provincial towns to London in Britain and to the coastal cities in the U.S. (Cooke died in New York City while on tour). Managers everywhere knew that his name on a playbill would ensure a full house.

There was but one problem. Alcohol is, and always has been, the curse of the theatrical profession (we remember Dionysius), and, in the Georgian period, Cooke was the greatest exemplar of the problem. His drinking led to his missing performances from single nights to a whole engagements. The thing that confounded commentators in his own time and historians ever since was the willingness of audiences and managers to forgive him his drunken performances and his absences no matter how egregious. He sometimes spoke directly to the audience, apologizing for his "little problem," upon which great cheers would rise from the house, and the performance would begin.

Robert executed a portrait of Cooke as Richard III for Thomas Harris, a avid art collector and the manager of Covent Garden who brought Cooke to London for his first extended engagement. It was a conventional portrait in

costume, and this is an etched copy of the original. The line inscribed in the banner is from act 3, scene 2, line 14.

CHARLES MATHEWS (1803–1878)

By Richard Dighton

Engraving. Caption: Mr MATHEWS AT HOME. Signed (in plate): Drawn Etch'd & Pub'd by Richard Dought'n, as the Act directs March 28, 1822.

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,958. The Life of Mrs. Jordan. Extra-illustrated volume.

Mathews was a leading actor in lesser roles, personating over four hundred characters in his long career. Playing that many characters he became proficient in a great array of accents and dialects and all the nuances and rhythms that went with each. He was also a superb mimic. Theodore Hook first, and then George Colman the younger and Samuel Beazley seized on Mathews's unique talents and wrote plays, obviously all farces, in which Mathews portrayed multiple characters. For example, in Hook's *Killing No Murder*, Mathews was a strolling actor appropriately named "Buskin," and as Buskin, Mathews impersonated a haughty impoverished M.P., a bootblack, a waiter, a French hairdresser, and a cook; in one madcap scene he was on stage as the hairdresser and the cook simultaneously.

Using a similar scheme, Mathews, together with his wife, concocted a series of one-man shows that he toured all over England and America. Called "At Homes," they were pastiches of songs and stories by or about eccentric characters that were held together by slender themes, thus, *The Trip to Paris* or *Mr. Mathews and his Youthful Days*.

Richard has drawn him as he appeared in his many "At Home" performances: wearing ordinary street attire, using only a table and chair as his setting. The two strange devices on the corners of the table are Argand lamps; they have ornamented reflectors that serve to highlight Mathews and to shield the lamp flames from the audience's eyes.

THE DIGHTONS AND THE KEMBLE

The Kemble family is the most famous dynasty in the history of the British theatre. It began with Roger Kemble, a provincial actor and manager, and his wife, Sarah (Ward) Kemble, an actress. Roger and Sarah had twelve children; four died young, but the eight who reached maturity turned to the theatre:

Sarah Kemble Siddons, John Philip Kemble, Stephen Kemble, Frances Kemble Twiss, Elizabeth Kemble Whitlock, Anne Kemble Hatton, Charles Kemble, and Jane Kemble Mason.

Sarah, John Philip, and Stephen were immensely popular, and Robert drew and published portraits of each. Charles, the eleventh-born child, was almost a whole generation younger than Sarah, and it is fitting that his portrait was done by Robert's youngest son, Richard.

Business alone would have been a good enough reason for Dighton to publish portraits of the Kembles, for they were sure to be big sellers. But Robert seems to have had a personal acquaintance with the family, possibly through his own work in the theatre. His portrait of Stephen, the only one that approaches being a caricature, looks very much like a good-natured prank that one would play on a friend. His portraits of John Philip and Sarah are not caricatures, but it is difficult to look at them without smiling. But neither are the portraits flattering—he unabashedly pictures Sarah's increasing matronly figure, for example. Dighton's caricature, "The Pit-Door," also suggests a personal acquaintance with the Kembles, in that he included a bill on the theatre wall announcing that the play that evening would be *The Grecian Daughter* with Mrs. Siddons and that the play on the following evening would be *Hamlet* with John Philip Kemble.

Their contemporaries spoke of the "Kemble physiognomy" and of the "Kemble school of acting." The latter was essentially an unhurried, declamatory style. Robert's three portraits show Stephen, John Philip, and Sarah all with an arm upraised in a gesture that certainly suggests that they are declaiming. Of the Kemble physiognomy, it is not clear whether those contemporaries meant the Kembles' ability through facial expression to impart a character's temperament or state of mind, or simply their facial features. If it is the latter, examine the composite below, made up of details from the four Dighton portraits: Sarah, John Philip (his image handily reversed), Stephen, and Charles. Dighton presents the same face four times.

Graphic: Details of the Dighton portraits of the four Kemble siblings.

Portrait: Maria Theresa De Camp (1774–1838) in a portrait drawn by Robert, engraved in stipple by Mackenzie, and printed in sepia ink. De Camp, an actress and sometime playwright, married Charles Kemble on July 2, 1806. She was the mother of Frances Anne Kemble and Adelaide Kemble Sartoris.

SARAH SIDDONS (1755–1831)

By Robert Dighton

Hand-colored engraving.

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,917.

Sarah Siddons is accounted the greatest tragic actress ever to have performed on the British stage. She was much admired, and even Samuel Johnson, a man stingy with his compliments, pronounced her, "a prodigious fine woman." She was a tall, strikingly beautiful woman who moved and spoke with elegance. It is said that she was so accustomed to speaking blank verse onstage that she often spoke it offstage—in an oft repeated story, she was once overheard complaining to a waiter: "You brought me water, boy; I asked for beer."

Robert's somewhat whimsical portrait of Siddons was published six months after his portrait of her brother John Philip Kemble, and it is considered a companion to it; the two portraits are wonderfully symbiotic. The Siddons portrait is not unflattering, but Robert did not back away from the truth. She was forty-four, and the Kemble weight problem was creeping in: she has a matronly figure and her angular features, so evident in earlier portraits, have rounded.

Siddons wears, as her brother would have insisted, a quasi-classical gown, but the gown is nevertheless *haute couture*, which is totally appropriate, for Elvira came from a noble Spanish family and, as Pizarro's paramour, had followed him to Peru.

The line quoted is from Elvira's caution to Pizarro (in act 3, scene 3, line 38), and it is the first hint that Elvira ultimately will turn against him and give aid and succor to the Peruvians.

Playbill: Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, May 24, 1799, the first performance of *Pizarro*. *Pizarro* is an adaptation by Richard Brinsley Sheridan of August Kotzebue's *Die Spanier in Peru*.

JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE (1757–1853)

By Robert Dighton

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,919.

Detractors of Kemble's acting grouched that he was wooden, all too often assuming a pose and declaiming his lines, that he mispronounced certain words consistently (Lamb published a list of them), and that he frequently mumbled. Be that as it may, the public adored Kemble, and he rose to the top of his profession and remained there for thirty years.

Sheridan's adaptation of Kotzebue's *Pizarro* opened at Drury Lane on May 24, 1799 with an impressive cast that included Kemble as Rolla, his brother Charles as Alonzo, and his sister Sarah as Elvira. Robert pictures Kemble delivering Rolla's inspirational speech (act 2, scene 2) to the Peruvian soldiers prior to their going into battle against the Spaniards. The line cited became popular across England—its words mirrored British sentiment in the current political struggle between England and France.

Kemble was interested in all things classical, harking back to his Greek and Latin studies at Douai and the recent discoveries about Greek civilization. As Drury Lane's manager, Kemble tended to dress his performers in quasi-classical costumes whether or not such was apposite to the play. To wit, *Pizarro* is set in the first half of the sixteenth century, and Rolla is a Peruvian general, but Kemble wears a Greek *chiton*. Few in the audience would have known the costume's origin, but all would have known from the feathers in his headdress that Kemble was playing an "Indian."

STEPHEN KEMBLE (1758–1822)

By Robert Dighton

Hand-colored engraving. Caption: HAMLET in SCOTLAND. A LARGE manager in a GREAT CHARACTER. that I have thought some of nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them well; they imitated humanity so abominably. Pub'd Dec'r 6th. 1794. Signed: Drawing & Etch'd by R Dighton, Stephen Kemble. 12 Charing Cross.

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,919.

Although Kemble acted as a child in his father's company and continued to act throughout his life, his major work in the theatre was as a manager, first in Edinburgh and Glasgow, later in Liverpool, Newcastle, and other provincial towns, and finally at Covent Garden in London.

There is no evidence that Kemble ever performed Hamlet in either Edinburgh or Glasgow. No matter, Robert published his caricature on December 6, 1794: "HAMLET in SCOTLAND. A LARGE manager in a GREAT CHARACTER." Kemble's corpulence was well-known, and Robert depicts him as shorter than his actual height (5 feet 9 inches) and with oversized hands and undersized feet in order to emphasize this corpulence (in 1794 Kemble weighed well over 250 pounds). He dresses Kemble in quasi-contemporary clothes while following Shakespeare's own descriptions: a suit "of solemn black" (act 1, scene 2, line 78), "all unbrac'd, No hat upon his head, his stocking foul'd, Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle" (act 2, scene 1, lines 78–80). He outfits him with

a star and a baldric from which hangs the elephant medallion of the Danish Order. (The quotation below the title is from act 3, scene 2, line 35.)

Kemble continued to gain weight, and in the last fifteen years of his life his most frequent role was Falstaff, which, wonderfully, he was able to do without any padding. With age, all of the Kembles grew stout; Stephen was merely precocious.

CHARLES KEMBLE (1775–1854)

By Richard Dighton

Uncolored and hand-colored engravings.

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,922.

Kemble first performed the part of Charles Surface in *The School for Scandal* in 1800, when he was twenty-five. It became “his role,” and he continued playing it until 1832, when he was fifty-seven.

Richard’s portrait, seen on the left as “penny plain” and on the right as “twopence colored,” shows Kemble in the role at age forty-six. It is a somewhat aggrandized portrait. Richard gives him an unlined, unwrinkled face and makes him taller and slimmer (the odds are that Kemble, given his family’s tendency to middle-age spread, was wearing an “Apollo,” a male corset that was introduced in England in 1813). Richard’s picture is something of a letdown, especially when compared to Dighton *pere*’s Kemble portraits: one laughs heartily at Stephen and chortles at least at John Philip and Sarah. There is no urge even to smile at Richard’s Charles.

John Philip Kemble, with his interest in the classic revival, had tended to dress his performers in Greek and Roman costumes whether or not they were appropriate to the context of the play. Charles, following his brother as manager of Covent Garden, put this foible aside, and actively sought historical accuracy. *The School for Scandal* was still performed as a contemporary piece, and Kemble, as the young blade Charles, wears the latest London fashions: the new double-breasted cutaway jacket, a tall starched cravat, tight-legged trousers, and laced and tied shoes. He wears gloves and carries a *chapeau de bras*.

Portrait: Charles Kemble as Charles Surface in *The School for Scandal*, in an undated, unsigned lithograph based on Richard’s 1821 etching.

WILLIAM FARREN (1786–1861)

By Richard Dighton

Hand-colored engraving.

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,924.

Farren made his London début in 1818 as Sir Peter Teazle in *The School for Scandal*. Sir Peter became his signature role, and he continued to perform it masterfully it is said, until his retirement thirty-seven years later. Farren rarely strayed from comedy and actually made a career of playing old men. The *Dictionary of National Biography* is none too kind to Farren: of his acting it says, "A hard wood at first, Farren took ultimately a high polish," and of him, "He seems to have been reserved in his habits, unsocial, intellectually dull, and careful in pecuniary expenses."

Richard's portrait of Farren is a companion piece to his portrait of Charles Kemble as Charles Surface, though they need to be arranged back-to-back. What a scowl there is on Sir Peter's face—quite different from the placid look of Charles Surface—picturing him as he expels the scandalmongers from his house (act 5, scene 2).

Farren's costume (it would be been supervised scrupulously by Charles Kemble) is completely apposite to the role, given that, in 1821, the play was still performed as a contemporary piece. Sir Peter, who in Sheridan's notes is fifty-eight, wants things to remain as they were. There is an adage that men develop their life-long dress habits in their mid-twenties; calculated thus, Sir Peter would be wearing clothes from about 1785. Every item that Farren wears from his wig, to his frock coat, to his striped waistcoat, to his knee-breeches, to his shoes, dates from 1780–85.

CATHARINE LEE SUGG (1799–1848)

By Robert Dighton

Uncolored engraving. Caption: The Infant ROSCIUS and BILLINGTON, MISS LEE SUGG. Born July 27th 1799. Patroniz'd by the PRINCE of WALES at Brighton Aug't 29th 1804. Rollo — We serve a MONARCH whom we Love, A GOD whom we Adore. Signed (in plate): Dighton Fecit. Char'g Cross. Pub'd Jan'y 1805 by Mr Lee Sugg at Jones's Hackney Coffee House & Tavern Hackney.

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,918.

The portrait of Leesugg, dated January 1805, is puzzling: (1) it was etched by Robert from someone else's drawing, (2) it was not published by Robert but by Leesugg's father, and (3) it is a conscious and deliberate attempt to copy—indeed, it is a near tracing—Robert's 1799 portrait of John Philip Kemble as

Rolla, placing Leesugg in the same pose, wearing an almost identical costume, and reciting the same line from the play. The print itself is puzzling: it is a restrike, published in New York in 1872, one of an edition of thirty, perhaps intended for insertion into extra-illustrated volumes.

As strong as was the attempt to copy Kemble's costume, there are notable differences between his and hers that were dictated by the period's mores: her *chiton* has been lengthened to below her knees and it has sleeves (women's arms were generally covered to the elbow, though the sleeves might be pushed up), and she wears stockings and shoes for it was inadmissible for women to appear on stage with bare legs or bare feet.

After her stint as a "che-ild actor," Leesugg spent several years working at the Theatre Royal in Birmingham. In 1818 she came to America where she was engaged to perform at the Park Theatre in New York, making her first appearance there in *A Cure for the Heart-Ache*. In 1819, she married James Henry Hackett (later to become a noted character actor and manager) and essentially retired from the stage.

Graphic: A transparent copy of Leesugg superimposed on a silhouette of John Philip Kemble (the latter image reversed) showing the similarity of the two drawings.

ROBERT DIGHTON AND ROBERT LAURIE

Complete set of twelve mezzotint engravings, six men and six women.

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,926 and 26,937.

Robert Laurie (1755?-1836) was a skilled mezzotint engraver active in London from 1771 until 1794. His name, as incised in his own plates, is spelled variously Lowery, Lowry, Lowrie, Lawrey, Lawrie, but mainly Laurie. He worked almost exclusively as a reproductive engraver, that is, he engraved plates from drawings or paintings done by others rather than from his own work.

In 1779, H. Richardson, a London book and print publisher and seller, retained Dighton and Laurie to produce a series of twelve matching portraits of contemporary performers. The portraits were not to be the penny-plain sort but distinctive works printed on high-quality paper intended to be collected or used as wall art.

Nothing is known of Dighton's original drawings, but Laurie used a uniform format throughout: 6-inch by 4½-inch plates, with the half-length portraits set in dark elliptical frames fitted into rectangles. Below the portraits are white bands with trophies (with a unique design for each picture) comprised of

musical instruments and borrowings from a theatrical prop room, the performers' names, and the publication data. The subjects all wear elegant street attire (as opposed to stage costumes); the women have enormous masses of hair richly ornamented with ribbons, beads, and even a turban.

Richardson sold the portraits in two sets of six each, divided male and female: the first issued on July 10, 1779 with James William Dodd, David Garrick (who had died on January 20), George Mattocks, Robert Palmer, William Parsons, and Richard Wroughton, and the second issued on March 1, 1780 with Elizabeth Harper, Isabella Mattocks, Jane Pope, Mary Ann Wroughton, Mary Ann Yates, and Elizabeth Younge.

EXTRA-ILLUSTRATED BOOKS

The term "extra-illustrated books," is not a household one, and this explanation, taken from John Carter's *ABC for Book-Collectors* (New York, 1951), is offered:

In 1769 James Granger published a *Biographical History of England* with blank leaves for the addition of portraits, etc., to the taste of the purchaser. Hence *grangerizing*, for the practice which he formalized and promoted. Grangerized, or extra-illustrated books as they are now more commonly called, are copies which have had added to them, either by a private owner or professionally, engraved portraits, prints, etc., usually cut out of other books, and sometimes also autograph letters, documents or drawings . . .

In general, in book-workers' parlance, for a book to be considered an extra-illustrated volume, the supplementary material must be sufficient to require that the whole be rebound.

The Harvard Theatre Collection has over a thousand extra-illustrated volumes. A half dozen of them are used in this exhibition, two here: on the left, James Boaden, *Memoirs of the Life of John Philip Kemble* (2 vols. extended to 8; London: 1825), and on the right, John Doran, *Their Majesties' Servants; or, Annals of the English Stage from Betterton to Kean*, 3rd ed. Revised by Robert W. Lowe (3 vols. extended to 5; London: 1888). Both were produced in London in 1888, probably by Frederick W. Pailthorpe, a professional extender.

Tucked away in these two volumes are three watercolor portraits by Robert Dighton picturing James William Dodd, John Moody, and John Palmer (only two can be shown). They were done at or near the same time—they are very much of a type, the figures are at the same scale, and they are colored from an identical palette. All are signed "R. Dighton del." The watercolors appear to be part of a series; similar drawings exist in other collections for Robert Bensley,

Cochran Joseph Booth, and John Quick.

JOHN MOODY (1727–1812)

By Robert Dighton

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,956.

John Moody was born John Cochran in Cork, Ireland. In his late teens he fled to Jamaica in the West Indies to avoid conscription, and it was there that he began to act. It is said that he changed his name to Moody to conceal his Irish origins.

He returned to England in 1758, and in 1759 he joined the acting company at Drury Lane. In his first year there he created the role of Sir Callaghan O'Brallagan in Macklin's *Love-à-la-Mode* and became an overnight star. Though he had changed his name to hide his Irish birth, he was soon London's leading purveyor of comic Irish characters, and during his thirty-seven years at Drury Lane he played dozens of them. Garrick, Cumberland, and Kelly all wrote plays with Irish characters with Moody specifically in mind. Around 1790, Moody seem to tire of acting though he kept at it for another six years, and his sodden, lethargic, walk-through performances turned both the critics and his former fans against him.

The portrait of Moody here, an original watercolor, is one of an apparent series that Robert did soon after 1785. Robert pictures him as Stephano, the drunken butler in *The Tempest*, a role that Moody had been playing at Drury Lane since 1763. Robert aptly poses him holding a flagon of wine. He easily captures Moody's tall, bulky figure, his large head, and especially his large, heavy eyes that were described variously as "leaden," "sleepy," and, with the obvious pun, "muddy."

JAMES WILSON DODD (1734–1796)

By Robert Dighton

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,955.

Beginning as a very young man, Dodd spent eleven years traveling back and forth through provincial towns, working to perfect his craft by taking on every role offered, comic or tragic. It is said that one day he stopped, took stock of his attributes, and asked himself whether it was better to be a journeyman general actor or a superb comic actor. He was small in stature, had a high, broad forehead (contemporaries spoke of his "moonface"), and a weak voice. Everything argued for comedy, and he took that route, playing comedic characters of every sort, from elegant fools (Sir Andrew Aguecheek in *Twelfth*

Night was one of his best roles) to bumpkins, but he specialized in fops and coxcombs.

Robert's remarkable skill as a watercolorist is apparent in this drawing, seen, for example, in the very subtle coloring of Dodd's face and hands and in the use of transparent shadows to suggest Dodd's slight paunch. Robert emphasizes Dodd's scrub figure by highlighting his large forehead, making him long-waisted with almost no shoulders, giving him very long hands, and standing him on short bandied legs and small feet. There is another copy of this drawing at the Garrick Club in London, but with completely different coloring: a blue jacket, a white waistcoat with gold buttons, and black breeches.

The inked notation, probably added by the compiler, is incorrect; Dodd is shown as Sparkish in *The Country Wife*.

EDMUND KEAN (1787?–1833)

By Richard Dighton

Hand-colored engraving.

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,911.

By almost any standard that can be applied, Richard's portrait of Kean is disappointing. Thus:— In 1815, Drury Lane revived *A New Way to Pay Old Debt* with Kean in the leading role. The first performance is described by W. S. Scott. "Kean's acting as Sir Giles Overreach reached heights of terror never before scaled upon the stage. A number of the audience had to be removed in hysterics; Lord Byron, who was present, had a convulsive fit; many of his fellow actors collapsed from fear, and were unable to complete the performance; while Munden, who was playing Marrall, had to be dragged off the stage by his armpits murmuring 'My God! My God! Is it possible?'"

The Kean that Richard drew could never have given that performance, and neither would he do well in the role of Junius Brutus. He is wooden; he has no energy whatsoever and seems unlikely ever to have any; he has none of those inner tensions that drove Kean onstage and off and from which he was never able to escape. And curiously, the portrait barely captures Kean's appearance or stature: Kean's penetrating eyes that were remarked by nearly everyone are lost in the profile pose, his nose was never so beak-like, and while he had curly hair, it was cut high on his neck and not worn in rolled curls (unless in Kean's portrait Richard is spoofing the recent introduction of curlpaper); he was less than average height, had a heavy, muscular body and bent legs that had been broken while he was a circus performer.

Playbill: Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, December 3, 1818, the first

performance of *Brutus; or, the Fall of Tarquin*. Edmund Kean played the title role in the tragedy written by the expatriate American, John Howard Payne.

THE MYRTLE AND VINE

Illustrated by Robert Dighton

Caption (on the book in the engraving): THE MYRTLE AND VINE; OR, COMPLETE VOCAL LIBRARY. . . BY C. H. WILSON, Esq. . . . London: Printed for West and Hughes . . . [1800]. Vol. 2.

Two volumes shown. Mr Munden Dighton sc Mackenzie sc.

Collection of Evert Jansen Wendell, bequest, 1918. Houghton Library 25253.29.7*, formerly in the Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,963.

In 1800, West & Hughes, a London publisher, brought out a four-volume compilation of popular songs from England, Ireland, and Scotland that was entitled *The Myrtle and Vine*. The compiler and editor was Charles Henry Wilson (d. 1804), a literary hack who had prepared a similar work published in Edinburgh in 1779, called *St. Cecilia; or, The Lady's and Gentleman's Harmonious Companion*. This new work sold well enough that it went through three editions, the last issued in 1803.

The Myrtle and Vine was a greater effort than *St. Cecilia*. For it, Wilson collected almost nine hundred songs (many fewer than his claimed "several thousands," but Wilson was given to hyperbola), wrote an essay on song writing and another on singing, wrote brief biographies of twelve singers active in the theatre or on the concert stage, and commissioned (or persuaded West & Hughes to commission) new portraits of the featured twelve singers.

Nine of the portraits were drawn by Robert Dighton, and three were drawn by three Samuel Drummond; all twelve were engraved in stipple by K. Mackenzie. Drummond (1765-1844) was an active London portraitist and later curator of the Royal Academy; and Mackenzie is essentially unknown. The pictures below are a sampling Dighton's and Mackenzie's work.

In 1802, West & Hughes sold the original plates to another London publisher, T. Hurst, who eradicated the elegantly styled names, re-engraved the names with a simple Roman face, and used the plates to illustrate his new publication, *The Thespian Dictionary*.

THE PIT DOOR – LA PORTE DU PARTERRE

By Robert Dighton

Mezzotint engraving.

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,938.

This picture alone would push Dighton into the category of caricaturists (the mezzotint was published by Carington Bowles in 1784). It is a superb depiction of the longtime problem of crowding at the entrance to the Drury Lane Theatre. There was one narrow door through which everyone heading to the pit—the sunken area between the orchestra pit and the first ring of boxes—had to enter.

The picture is funny in its unalloyed coarseness. The crowd, all with fat, dwarfish figures and outsized heads, push through a spiked gateway toward the pit door. Men outnumber women by about three to one. In the headlong rush, two women have lost their hats, two women have each lost one shoe, a man winces in pain (perhaps someone is standing on his foot), two men go at each other with clinched fists, a woman screams as a man holding a stick above his head is about to cudgel her husband (who may have started the affray by raising his own stick), a man in his cups is losing his wig and his lunch onto and into the mouth of another man, a woman who has fainted but is still erect because there is no place to fall is administered smelling salts by her companion, and on and on and on. Meanwhile the ticket seller, tucked safely in the pay box, goes about his work unhurriedly, at the moment skeptical of the genuineness of the coin he has been given.

While most of the picture is done in heavy grays, there is a bright area in the upper center, and in it, on the wall above the heads of the crowd, Dighton has posted a playbill: *By Command of their Majesties. At the Theatre Royal Drury Lane this present Thursday Oct 21 1784 The Grecian Daughter . . . Euphrasia M^{rs} Siddons. To which will be added The Devil to Pay.* There follows in very small type some of the cast list for the afterpiece and then: *Tomorrow the Tragedy of Hamlet. Hamlet by M^r Kemble.*

MRS. H. JOHNSTON (b. 1782)

By Denis Dighton

Hand-colored engraving. Caption: Mrs. H. JOHNSTON, in the MELODRAMA of TIMOUR the TARTAR. Signed (in plate): Pub'd by Dighton. Spring Gardens. June, 1811. Signed: D—Dighton, del.

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,921.

Mrs. Johnston (*née* Nannette Parker; the wife of Henry Erskine Johnston, a moderately successful actor) was an accomplished singer, dancer, and equestrian.

trian, and a tall, classic beauty. She was a natural to play Zorilda in M. G. Lewis's *Timour, the Tartar*. Here are the stage directions for her first entrance:

The Tartars arrive on horseback, conducting ZORILDA, dressed as an Amazon, holding an arrow, and wearing a quiver. [She rides] over the bridge and through the gate. . . . She is mounted on a courser richly caparisoned, and attended by four African boys in golden chains, and holding fans of painted feathers—two of them prostrate themselves—the others throw a tapestry over them—the courser kneels, and she steps on the slaves to dismount. . . .

This portrait is the only known picture that Denis Dighton drew that relates to the theatre. Samuel Redgrave, in *A Dictionary of Artists*, says that Denis, “. . . drew some caricatures in his father's manner, yet better drawn.” Denis's portrait of Mrs. Johnston might prove that, for it is one of the most charming pictures done by any of the Dighton family. Denis left out the African boys, but he captured Johnston and her nimble warhorse outfitted in their matching barbarian costumes. Both Denis and his father delighted in drawing riding horses; they generally drew them at a smaller scale than their riders, usually prancing, always with prominent eyes, dilated nostrils, and tossed, over-long manes and tails—very much like painted carousel horses.

Playbill: Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, April 29, 1811, the first performance of M. G. Lewis's “Romantick Melo-Drama,” *Timour the Tartar*. It may have been the afterpiece, but it got larger billing than the main piece, *The Comedy of Errors*.

THOMAS SHAW (1760?–1830?)

By Robert Dighton

Hand-colored engraving. Caption: SHAW – SHAW. Mr. Shaw, leader of the band of music at Drury Lane theatre. Pub Nov'r 1st. 1796, by Dighton Char'g Cross. Signed (in plate): Dighton. Del't.

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,959. From an extra-illustrated copy of *The Life of Mrs. Abington*, London, 1888, Vol. 2. Collection of Daniel Paine Griswold, Class of 1887, bequest, 1922. TS 997.200.

Shaw is first noticed in Bath in 1769, and then for several years thereafter, as the lead violinist, and hence, the conductor, of a series of subscription concerts, and in Bristol, of single concerts featuring vocal and instrumental music, including some of his own compositions. In 1776, Shaw was granted membership in the Royal Society of Musicians, and the same year, he went to London and joined the band at Drury Lane. In 1786, Shaw took over as the band's leader, which job he continued until 1809. While at Drury Lane he composed overtures, songs,

and incidental music for several pastiches, extravaganzas, and afterpieces. Apart from his theatre work, Shaw composed a violin concerto, a string trio, twelve sonatas for keyboard, and some short pieces for solo flute.

Robert's portrait, done in 1786, honored Shaw in his new position as band leader at Drury Lane. In the mid-eighties Robert was interested in half-length portraits, which scheme suited perfectly for showing Shaw in an orchestra pit. He shows Shaw in profile, another Dighton development of the mid-eighties, violin in place, playing *solus*. (Note the spikes on the pit railing, a standard feature in London theatres since *The Chinese Festival* riots in 1755, to prevent unruly audiences from clambering onto the stage and attacking the performers.)

Incidentally, in 1791, Haydn, having visited Shaw at home, told his notebook that "Mrs. Shaw is the most beautiful woman I ever saw."

MARY ANNE WILSON (1802–1867)

By Richard Dighton

Caption: MISS WILSON, in ARTAXERXES. Signature (in plate): Drawn Etch'd by Rich'd Dighton 1821.

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,913.

Wilson, a student of the noted vocal teacher, Thomas Welsh, made her début at Covent Garden on January 18, 1821, as Mandane in Thomas Arne's *Artaxerxes*. London was enraptured: her performance, according to *Grove's Dictionary*, "caused an immediate *fuore*, as much for her youth and looks as for her fresh voice and brilliant singing." Between her début and July 5, she sang some sixty-five nights; she then undertook a six-month-long provincial tour. It was a lucrative year with her earning the astounding and unprecedented sum of £10,000. Her monetary gain was, in fact, a huge loss, for the rigorous performance schedule destroyed her unseasoned soprano voice and ruined her health. She retired from the stage two years later, and in 1827, she married Welsh.

Richard, too, was caught up in the Wilson *fuore*, and responded by rushing out his caricature. Wilson had a pronounced aquiline nose and an equally pronounced receding chin; Richard emphasized both, and by keeping her ears small, her hair in tight ringlets, and elongating the feathers on her fillet, he made her into a song-bird (resembling particularly a pewit).

Wilson wears a gown reflecting London's latest fashions in women's dress, and yet it is the standardized "Oriental" theatrical costume of the Georgian Regency periods (albeit, the cross on her necklace is an incongruity).

Playbills: Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, January 18, 1821, the night Mary

Anne Wilson made her sensational début in *Artaxerxes*; Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, January 20, 1821, with the manager's puff in full view.

ANN MARIA TREE (1801–1862)

By Richard Dighton

2 engravings: *Twelfth Night* and *Comedy of Errors*.

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,914.

Tree began her career at Drury Lane as a utility performer, singing and dancing in the chorus. She was engaged at Bath for a season, playing larger roles. On her return to London she shifted to Covent Garden, where she advanced quickly, serving first as an understudy and then a standby and finally becoming a soloist. She came to specialize in Shakespearean roles whether original or adapted and whether spoken or sung (for example, she was a great hit in an 1819 operatic adaptation by Henry Bishop and Frederick Reynolds of *The Comedy of Errors*). She is said to have had an expressive mezzo-soprano voice.

Richard issued his portrait of Tree in 1819, the year of Mary Anne Wilson's stunning début in *Artaxerxes*, and with this portrait as a companion piece to his portrait of Wilson, he could offer for sale pictures of the opposing sopranos from Drury Lane and Covent Garden. "Opposing" is the key word. It did not escape Richard who loved word games that Tree and Wilson had near palindromic given names—Ann Maria and Mary Anne—and he uses this idea of reversal or opposition in his composition of their portraits: the two are in an identical pose flipped left to right. Tree has a small *retroussé* nose and strong chin, shows a slight smile, and wears stylish, but very simple and chaste street attire; Wilson has a long aquiline nose and receding chin, has a startled expression, and wears the exotic stage costume of a barbarian.

Playbill: Ann Maria Tree did not perform on the Friday night that Wilson made her début at Drury Lane; she had a week off following her fifteenth performance as Viola in *Twelfth Night* on January 16 and her next performance as Luciana in Reynolds and Bishop's operatic adaptation of *The Comedy of Errors* on January 23.

BELL'S EDITION OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Illustrated by Robert Dighton

Three loose engravings. Aicken as King Henry. Brereton as Troilus. Weston as Costard.

Frontispiece engraving to volume. Aiken as Bolingbroke. King Richard II. 1774.

Houghton Library, ex Harvard Theatre Collection.

It had become customary in the publication of Shakespeare's plays, following Nicholas Rowe's edition in 1709, to include a picture for each play that depicted some key scene or climactic moment in the play. The pictures were line engravings done in a highly romantic, painterly style, that generally had no apposition to the stage or a performance.

In the early 1770's, when James Bell was planning what would become *Bell's Edition of Shakespeares [sic] Plays* (8 vols.; London: 1773–74), he chose to continue that tradition, and, further, he would include a second picture for each play—a “lively DRAMATIC CHARACTER, painted from the life, by Permission, on purpose for this work only, and executed by the best Engravers in London.” The resulting pictures are genuinely innovative: each depicts in a full-length portrait, a contemporary actor working or at least known in London, pictured in costume, at a relevant moment in the play (captioned below to identify that moment). The actor is seen through a frame, against a totally blank background, thus making the picture like today's “studio shot.” There are minimal shadows only, beginning at the feet and curiously dropping off between the knees and the waist, that are used to anchor the subject to the unseen ground. With five artists and six or more engravers involved, these conventions must have been established before the work began.

Dighton was chosen to prepare portraits for four plays: *Henry VI, Part 2*, *Richard II*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, and *Troilus and Cressida*. He made India ink drawings tinted with watercolors: the first was engraved by William Walker (seen here *in situ*), the second and third by Charles Grignion, and the fourth probably by Dighton.

JOHN LISTON (1776–1846)

By Richard Dighton

Hand-colored engraving.

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,920.

Liston is the stuff of legend. He was one of the best and most popular comic actors in the late Georgian period—indeed, he was the special favorite of George IV himself. He commanded the highest salary ever paid a comedian, earning as much as 250 to 350 pounds a week enabling him to leave an estate of £40,000. However, off-stage, he was, according to various commentators, “of a

nervous temperament, and subject to fits of depression," "grave in his expression, nervous, and rather remote from popular habits," and "never know to laugh." Liston is but another exemplar of the unhappy, neurotic comedian.

Liston was not a physical comic, in the manner of Munden or the Grimaldis, but was a master of extraordinary facial expression. In his portrait, with Liston outfitted as Lubin Log in James Kenney's *Love, Law, and Physick*, Richard made a rare departure from his steady output of profile poses, drawing Liston in three-quarter face to show his unusual countenance with its wonderful *retroussé* nose overhanging a long upper lip and its wideness that was accented by close-set eyes, and to display his costume that begins with typical 1812 men's wear and is supplemented with a printed kerchief, a skullcap, and a top hat. The costume is an oddity: while Lubin Log is witless and a dupe, he is not a bumpkin but a successful London lumber merchant. However, for years to come, actors performing Log scrupulously copied Liston's costume (and, it might be noted, his stage business as well).

Playbill: Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, November 20, 1812, the first performance of *Love, Law, and Physick*, by James Kenney.

AT A TRAGEDY and AT A COMEDY

By Robert Dighton

Mezzotint engraving. Caption: AT A TRAGEDY.

Mezzotint engraving. Caption: AT A COMEDY.

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,950 and 26,951.

Pictures, particularly caricatures, of audiences watching performances were popular in the Georgian period, possibly because they demonstrated that those in the auditorium are as theatrical and at least as interesting as those on stage. A subset of this genre are paired pictures, one showing an audience watching tragedy and one showing an audience watching a comedy. The caricaturists especially liked these: Rowlandson did a pair and Boyne did two pairs. Robert Dighton did the pair shown here, engravings in mezzotint.

In each of his pictures, Robert crowds a group of men together in the first two rows of the pit, and insures that they remain the focus by enclosing them in an oval mat. Although the fronts of the boxes and several chandeliers are lightly sketched in, no other audience members are visible.

In "At a Tragedy," ten men witness a performance of *Isabella; or, the Fatal Marriage* (written by Thomas Southerne and adapted by David Garrick) with Sarah Siddons in the title role, it being one of her greatest parts. Every face in

the picture shows extreme emotion. In the front row, one fellow has had a convulsive fit; in the back row, one fellow weeps copious tears, while another presents his ear-trumpet to the stage and struggles to turn his eyes that he might both hear and see the ineffable events thereon.

In "At a Comedy," eight men watch a performance of *All in Good Humour* (written by Walley Chamberlain Oulton). Whereas those attending *Isabella* have polished, well-bred look, those at *All in Good Humour* evince a more plebeian character: two are without wigs; several have prominent warts or moles on their faces; one is particularly simian; one uses an opera glass and one uses a lorgnon, both no doubt trained on an actress's décolleté or legs; most wear decidedly lecherous expressions. Dighton is having his little joke, for in *All in Good Humour*, there is not a single prurient line or action or double entendre. In Oulton's dedication, he says that ". . . This little dramatic effort [is] intended merely to create an innocent laugh for half an hour." It might do that, for it has well-written, amusing dialogue, but, alas, used in a trifling plot. Dighton's playbill is a fake: *All in Good Humour* opened at the Haymarket Theatre on July 7, 1792, and it remained in the repertory there for twenty years or so. So far as is known, it was never performed at Covent Garden.

CHARLES DIBDIN

By Robert Dighton

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,904.

Music seems to have been within Charles Dibdin (1745–1814) from birth, and in his sixty-nine years he composed an untold number of songs, easily numbering two thousand or more, and about seventy works for the stage—mostly musical afterpieces, but also operas, burlettas, serenatas, pantomimes, and interludes. He published eleven collections of his own and others' songs and three music textbooks.

Robert's portrait of Dibdin, a formal half-length pose, engraved in mezzotint and published by Bowles and Carver, came out in 1794 when Dibdin was at the highest peak of his very up-and-down career. Indeed, Dibdin looks hearty, contented, and prosperous. He was all of those things (briefly): he had his own theatre, where he produced his own works; he was publishing a periodical; he had a music publishing business pushing out the hundreds of songs he was composing; and he had recently published two successful novels. But no matter, Robert would have taken care of his old friend, with whom he had worked and in whose pieces he had often performed.

Dibdin's career was a series of ups and downs. The downs were brought

about by his unceasing truculence and intransigence, his shabby treatment of his wife, his mistress, and his children, legitimate and illegitimate. The ups were as often as not generated by the efforts of a few kind friends. But essentially, Dibdin quarreled with everyone he ever knew. He died destitute and friendless.

GEORGE MATTOCKS (1735–1804) and

JOHN QUICK (1748–1831)

By Robert Dighton

Mezzotint engraving. Caption: Mr MATTOCKS and Mr. QUICK, in the characters of DON FERDINAND and ISAAC MENDOLA in the DUENNA.

Doran, *Their Majesties Servants*. Extra-illustrated volume. Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,957.

The arrangement of names and characters in the caption is confusing in that the names are reversed from the figures in the picture: John Quick as Isaac Mendoza is on the left and George Mattocks as Don Ferdinand is on the right.

Quick was another of the many superb comedians in the Georgian theatre, equally skilled in high and low comedy. It is said that he was the favorite of George III (which might be a dubious distinction). His list of original roles is long, but notably: Tony Lumpkin in *She Stoops to Conquer*, Bob Acres in *The Rivals*, and, his greatest, Isaac Mendoza in *The Duenna*.

Mattocks began singing at Covent Garden when he was just fourteen years old, and he continued to sing there for thirty-four years, specializing in opera—whether pastoral, ballad, or comic. His reputation says that he was an excellent singer and a woefully bad actor.

Robert pictures Isaac and Ferdinand in act 3, scene 2, which takes place in a piazza in Seville. The background is not a picturesque view conjured up in the artist's mind as is frequently the case in this type of illustration, but authentic Georgian scenery. Across the back, the view of the piazza is painted on shutters or a cloth drop; on the right, masking the side, is a wing (unfortunately not detailed). According to Samuel Redgrave in *A Dictionary of Artists*, Robert had worked as a scene painter, and that experience is evident here.

ROBERT DIGHTON ON STAGE

Dighton's career in the theatre was far from a major one, and given that his work was only part-time and then but irregular, it is surprising to find how much information remains with which to document his work. There are three or more self-portraits in costume, about three dozen playbills listing his name, nine sheet music covers noting that the pieces were "as sung by Mr. Dighton" at Sadler's Wells or the Patagonian Theatre or before the Anacreontic Society, a brief biography in *The Thespian Dictionary*, and occasional reviews.

According to the playbills, through the years Robert appeared in the following:

- 1781 *The Padlock*
- 1784 *Love in a Village*
- 1784 *The Beggar's Opera*
- 1785 *The Beggar's Opera*
- 1786 *The Gates of Calais*
- 1786 *Momus's Gift*
- 1787 *Hooly & Fairly, or The Highland Laddie and the Old Witch*
- 1788 *The Ephesian Matron*
- 1788 *The Quaker*
- 1788 *Merlin's Cave*
- 1789 *The Witch of the Lakes*
- 1789 *The Two Little Savoyards*
- 1790 *The Incas of Peru*
- 1790 *The Champs of Mars*
- 1790 *The Guardian Frigate*
- 1790 *Merlin's Cave*
- 1792 *The Coquette*
- 1792 *Queen Dido, or the Trojan Rangers*
- 1792 *Allegorical Divertissement*
- 1792 *The Fortune Hunters*
- 1792 *The New Prussian Manuel*
- 1792 *The Artillery Driver*
- 1792 *Dennis O'Neal's Return from Campaigning*
- 1793 *The Prize of Industry*
- 1793 *The Witch of the Lakes*
- 1794 *The Village Ghost*
- 1794 *The Rival Loyalist*
- 1795 *England's Glory*
- 1795 *Momus's Gift*

1795 *Gaffer's Mistake*

1796 *Momus's Gift*

1797 *The Muffin Man*

The Padlock, *Love in a Village*, and *The Ephesian Matron* are by Isaac Bickerstaffe, *The Beggar's Opera* is by John Gay, *The Coquette* is by R. Hitchcock, and *Momus's Gift* is by George Colman the Younger. The rest almost defy classification; those that made it into Allardyce Nicoll's *A Short-Title Alphabetical Catalogue of Plays Produced or Printed in England from 1660 to 1900* are noted as "sketches," "entertainments," "extravaganzas," "burlettas, or "recitatives." Most were written by Charles Dibdin or his son Thomas Dibdin.

Incidentally, Mrs. Dighton is listed on two individual sheet music covers and four collections "as sung by Miss Bertles"; all were written by James Hook, and all were performed at Vauxhall Gardens.

Playbill: Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, April 28, 1784, for John Henry Johnstone's benefit night, when Robert Dighton played the second lead in Bickerstaffe's ballad opera, *Love in a Village*.

SELF-PORTRAIT, AS THE MUFFIN MAN

By Robert Dighton

Engraving.

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,966.

"The Muffin Man" is first noticed in 1797, when it was performed as an *entr'acte* song at Covent Garden by a child singer; it is referred to as "a sketch" written by Thomas Dibdin and composed by John Moorehead, a violinist in the theatre's band. The song is not listed in the British Museum's *Catalogue of Printed Music*.

Robert performed it for the first time on May 28, 1800 at Covent Garden, and it became "his piece," and for years afterwards he sang it as an *entr'acte* number, especially at benefit performances for his fellow actors. He was obviously pleased with his quasi-ownership of the piece and his performance, and he did a self-portrait in the role. He shows himself in profile (of course), looking down pensively, walking with an obvious slow and labored gait, and ringing his bell. From Robert's representation, it might be assumed that "The Muffin Man," at least in part, is a melancholy song. The copy of the portrait shown here is reproduced from Denis Rose's biography, *Life, Times and Recorded Works of Robert Dighton (1752-1814)*.

On several programs in which Robert sang "The Muffin Man" as an *entr'acte* piece, he sang the "The Laughing Song" as a closing piece. Formally, "The Laugh-

ing Song" is "Haste thee, nymph," Air No. 5 from Handel's *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*. Robert may have carried the solo line, but he would have needed the help of some of the other performers to take the choral parts.

Playbill: Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, May 28, 1800, for Mrs. Thomas Dibdin's benefit. Robert Dighton offered his services to his old friend by performing *The Muffin Man* and singing *The Laughing Song*.

SELF-PORTRAIT, AS DENNIS O'NEAL

By Robert Dighton

Engraving. Caption: Mr. DIGHTON (*of Sadler's Wells*) in the Character of Dennis O'Neal.

Harvard Theatre Collection, HTC 26,900.

One of the advantages that Robert had as an artist-actor was his ability to publicize himself in a role with a picture that he could sell in his own shop, thus making money on both ends. And he did just that with this self-portrait in his most famous role as the title character in *Dennis O'Neal's Return from Campaigning*, that is described as "A Comic Vocal Effort," being a New Nabobish Chaunt in Anglo-East-Indian-Irish called 'Planxity Na-Bock-Lesh,'" that he originated at Sadler's Wells in 1792. A *nabob* was a person who had returned to England from India with a large fortune (in this period, nabobs were great targets for satire and caricature), and a *planxty* is in Irish music "a harp tune of a sportive and animated character" (*O.E.D.*). It is not difficult to imagine a sketch, certainly with music, about an Irish fellow (stereotypically fond of drink of course) who has served with the British army in India and has now returned home a bit of a nabob and tells his story in a variety of accents and dialects.

In addition to his self-portraits as "Dennis O'Neal" and as "The Muffin Man," Robert did one in an unknown role in an unknown play, titled "I'm the Thing, A'nt I?" and published in 1791 by Bowles and Carver. It is a half-length portrait in an oval mat—a dandy turned out in a cocked hat, a high-collared coat, a very full, ruffled jabot, and gloves. With his right hand he holds a lorgnon to his eye, and under his left arm he holds a rattan cane ornamented with tassels.

FROM THE PRESS AGENTS AND CRITICS

"... he was possessed of a very pleasing voice."

"... and in the Vocal Line, the well known and admired Mr. Dighton. . . ."

"Dighton did much credit to the humourous situations of Momus."

"Dighton has gained a most capital addition to his fame as a comic singer in the last chaunt of "The Artillery Driver."

"The principal acquisition, however, is Mr. Dighton, who promises to be a support to their burlettas. His character of the friar, in the entertainment of the states of Calais, was sustained well, and he gave evident proofs of an excellent bass voice, and a style of acting that must always secure applause."

"The public are most respectfully informed that by very particular desire, the address which was delivered by Mr. Dighton on this night and which was received with the most distinguished marks of approbation by a very numerous and polite audience, will be repeated this evening for the last time."

From Dennis Rose, *Life, Times and Recorded Works of Robert Dighton (1752-1814) Actor, Artist and Printseller and Three of his Artist Sons* (Lewes, Sussex, England: W. E. Baxter Ltd., 1981).

THE THESPIAN DICTIONARY

DEIGHTON, (Mr.) actor, formerly the hero of Sadler's Wells. Being a good comic singer, he was sometime engaged for pantomimes, &c. at Drury Lane Theatre, and is now a member of Covent Garden company. He follows the profession of a painter, and has considerable merit in caricature likenesses. He holds up to view several of the performers in his shop, Charing Cross; and his imitations give in general great satisfaction.

From *The Thespian Dictionary; or Dramatic Bibliography of the Eighteenth Century.*
London: T. Hurst, 1802.

ROBERT DIGHTON AS THIEF

There is no way to demonstrate with pictures and playbills Dighton's career in thievery, and the story must be narrated.

In 1794, Dighton met a Mr. Belloe, the Keeper of the Prints at the British Museum, and his daughter. The acquaintanceship grew into a strong friendship, and Dighton, as a matter of course, painted portraits of both father and daughter that he gave to them. He was there frequently, visiting, working on the portraits, and he more or less had the run of the Print Room. As would any artist, he always carried a portfolio. What Belloe did not realize was that Dighton was daily appropriating the museum's collection of prints and carrying them out in that innocent looking portfolio.

Curiously, the theft went undetected for twelve years, until 1806, and then it was discovered quite by accident. Dighton made a very good copy of Rembrandt's *Coach Landscape* and sold it for £10 to a publisher and dealer, Samuel Woodburn, who being very pleased with his auspicious purchase, showed it to a knowledgeable friend. The friend suggested immediately that it was a forgery, that there was only one known copy of that Rembrandt in existence, and that it was in the British Museum. To settle the matter, Woodburn and his friend went to the museum to make a comparison, and it was then discovered that that engraving and many others were missing. The disappearance was traced to Dighton. Many of the stolen prints were found in his shop, some were on consignment in other shops, and some had been sold. Dighton readily confessed to the theft. Almost all of the prints that had been sold were traced and recovered. They remain today in The Print Room at the British Museum marked with Dighton's signet, a D in a palette over a sheaf of brushes, that he had unashamedly stamped on each.

There is no evidence that Dighton was ever charged with the crime; he was never brought to trial. He did leave London at this time, and for three years traveled around England, staying for a time in Oxford, then Cambridge, Bath, Cheltenham, and Brighton, before returning to London. No one has said that in his travels and his shuttling about, he was evading prosecution, but several have suggested that London might have been too hot for him. Ironically, the hapless Mr. Belloe was dismissed from his post.

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